

NEWS

FSA Participates In Major Trade Mission To Africa

As the trade mission team departed for Africa on January 25, they were well prepared and enthusiastic. Much was riding on their shoulders for this 12-day trip. The team was tasked with making a case for U.S. agricultural exports and analyzing trade constraints in four Sub-Sahara African (SSA) countries – Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria. In this first-ever large-scale USDA visit, the team planned to explore the potential for expanded exports and to promote links between U.S. and African agribusinesses.

The 40-person team consisted of USDA officials from FAS, FSA, and AMS; two Congressional representatives; trade and banking experts; and agricultural producers and associations. The FSA staff included Roger Hinkle, Branch Chief of Warehouse and Inventory Division's Licensing Authority Branch, and Ted MacLaughlin, Section Head of Financial Management Division's Foreign Export Risk Analysis Section. Iowa State FSA Committee member Gary Cornelious, an organic beef and okra producer, also attended.

None other than President Clinton provided the impetus for this trip. "The President visited Africa two years ago and saw much potential for trade," says Hinkle. "He asked USDA to follow up on this untapped market, address constraints to agricultural trade and investment, and lay the groundwork for future visits." The trade mission was strongly supported by FSA and USDA management, including attendee

Patrick Steele, FAS Associate Administrator.

With the current downturn in the U.S. farm economy, we are busy looking for opportunities overseas, and for good reason: The U.S. typically exports between 25 and 30 percent of whatever its farms and ranches produce – nearly \$50 billion last year. Any boost in exports would be a real shot in the arm for our producers here at home! In recent years, Africa has made major strides in economic stability, and the U.S. focus on Africa has shifted from direct aid to efforts to generate bilateral trade. Currently, of SSA's \$7 billion agricultural import market, only \$750 million belongs to the U.S.

In each country, the trade team held seminars on USDA credit programs, commodity trading, marketing, banking, transportation, and warehousing. The meeting rooms were packed with attendees – over 100 government officials and agribusiness representatives at each meeting. Representatives from 14 other countries attended the seminar in Senegal. The team also visited agricultural sites, conducted one-on-one exporter/importer and banker meetings, and consulted with host government officials. The trade mission received front page press and television coverage throughout the region.

Hinkle's job was to evaluate the countries' port, warehouse, and distribution systems for commercial potential. "Also, at the seminars, I talked about how the U.S. systems deliver safe,



secure food and how these systems can be used as models for developing African markets." Hinkle examined how the flow of trade and distribution of goods in SSA countries is different from the U.S. "For instance," says Hinkle, "many African countries do not have the ability to hold a large stock of grain before milling. They depend on imports in a timely manner to meet their needs – currently Europe and Canada dominate the grain market."

At the seminars, Ted MacLaughlin discussed with bankers and importers USDA's guaranteed financing requirements. "To meet the needs of these particular markets and stimulate trade, we might need to adapt USDA's guaranteed financing programs," MacLaughlin says.

U.S. exporters on the team got a chance to make contacts with African agribusinesses and even sold certain commodities. One poultry producer, for example, did some follow-up work on

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ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN *from Associate Administrator Parks Shackelford*

Simple vs. Fair

One of the most difficult challenges that we face in FSA is the development of regulations and procedure to implement our programs. Whether it's the delivery of a new program passed by Congress or the review of a program we have administered for many years, we always face the same dilemma: *simple vs. fair*. FSA employees in the field do an outstanding job under what are often trying conditions. I hope this column will help you understand the difficult choices faced each day by the dedicated program staff people who do the initial implementation work.

When I came to USDA in September of 1993, we were in the process of delivering one of the largest disaster programs in the history of this Agency, courtesy of the Great Midwest Flood of '93. At that time, we had been administering disaster programs with very similar frameworks almost every year since the 1988 drought. Each year, Congress or the Administration would add a few more details to take care of special situations to the point that we were paying on everything from offshore oyster beds in Louisiana to corn quality losses in Michigan.

In addition to the disaster programs, the old Acreage Reduction Programs had become even more complex. For example, we had the 0/50/85/92 options, with or without minor oilseeds, the five-month grazing period, and had the wheat reached the hard dough stage? The worst mystery I've dealt with in my career was trying to figure out how to handle the calculation of forgiveness of refund of advance deficiency payments for producers who suffered disasters while participating in 50/85. Pardon me for digressing, but I think it does us all good to remember how complex some of our programs used to be as we struggle with today's challenges.

As a result of all these disaster programs, in early 1994 we faced a series of critical reports outlining the abuse of disaster programs by a small minority of less scrupulous individuals. Although they represented a very small percentage of our program participants, stories of fraud and abuse covered everything from the local news to the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*. Not only our programs, but also the very structure of our Agency and our county committee system were under attack. We responded by instituting a system of reforms (developed by staff from the field, I must add) to address areas of weakness in both the structure and management of the programs, through the improvement of procedure and the use of queries that allowed the staff at the field level to monitor the program as it progressed.

Facing both the criticism and the reform of the disaster programs that year helped me to understand the balancing act required of those who implement programs at the national level. Our job is to steady a swinging pendulum: How do we write programs that are open enough to ensure that we get disaster assistance to those farmers who have suffered severe losses and

really need our help, while at the same time writing the programs so that they are tight enough to prevent dishonest individuals from abusing the program and defrauding the taxpayer?

Through the years I have learned that this balancing act applies not just to disaster programs but to virtually all of the programs that we, as FSA employees, deliver. Whether it's a Direct Farm Operating Loan, the purchase of commodities for food assistance, or processing an application for the Livestock Assistance Program, we all have the same goals. We all want to deliver assistance to our customers in a manner that is simple, fast, and fair, and that maintains program integrity and the confidence of the public we serve. Everyone understands "fast." For most of the assistance we deliver, "program integrity" means we make payments or loans available only to those who qualify for and deserve the assistance. "Fair" and "simple" are where I start to have trouble. I once thought I understood those two terms.

The last two appropriations bills contained emergency provisions requiring FSA to create and deliver more than 20 new programs. The most difficult, in my opinion, was last year's Crop Loss Disaster Assistance Program (CLDAP), which required us to coordinate both single year and multiyear loss programs while interfacing the resources and programs of both FSA and the Risk Management Agency. While Congress had provided in the statute few details of how this assistance should be delivered, Senators and Representatives throughout the Nation wrote to express their opinions after the bill had passed. It will come as no surprise that many of these suggestions directly contradicted one another. We were urged to implement the program in a manner that was fair to all producers of all crops in all regions that had suffered disasters

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Editor: Jillene Johnson
Editorial Board: Janet Baker,
Star Bryant, Greg Hawkins,
Dann Stuart.

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FSA Public Affairs Staff
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Stop 0506
Washington, DC 20250-0506

AFRICA

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and to do so in a manner that was consistent with and did not undermine the Federal Crop Insurance Program, but issued payments to producers almost right away. Simple task, hmm...?

It was in the midst of the development of CLDAP that I had my moment of clarity: the great struggle of *simple vs. fair*. There is a direct inverse relationship between “simple” and “fair.” What do I mean by this? You can’t have it both ways. Whatever we do to make a program more equitable almost always makes it more complex. Whenever we knock out provisions and exceptions of a program to simplify it, we almost always make the program less “fair.” For example, we can deliver a program that is both “fast” and “simple,” but not if we want to make quality adjustments, using actual prices and yields, by county or producer, on more than 1,800 crops while protecting the taxpayer in the process. To make things even more complicated, what works in one part of the country often makes little sense in another.

I must acknowledge that Congress often requires us to administer programs that are unduly complicated to start with. Even so, the next time you pick up a handbook that’s hundreds of pages long and seems impossibly complicated, remember that many of those provisions were probably added as the result of a suggestion by someone like you who wanted to make the program better for a farmer, in his or her county, who needed help. We’ll continue to try to make the programs as simple as possible, but we have to balance that with everyone’s goal of making them fair.

Paul Shadoff

opening a 200,000 bird-a-day poultry facility. But, the visit was productive in more than a business sense as it broke down many barriers. “In each country, the U.S. ambassador and agricultural attache warmly welcomed us,” says Hinkle. “They were receptive and fully supportive of our mission. Many of our team members built relationships with officials and business people that will have a lasting impact.”

The team found significant potential for trade and investment as they explored markets for rice, wheat, soybeans, dairy, poultry, and fishery products. They also identified trading constraints such as foreign currency risks, local banking problems, packaging, and storage needs. The team has

recommended that USDA consider forming a permanent SSA task force to work on these issues and implement programs.

Team member Jerry Lee Bogard, CEO of Midland Rice, says, “I was introduced to credible import players. Now we know what we need to do to fight for these markets. We must be willing to follow commodity sales beyond the U.S. ports and commit resources for logistics, transportation, etc.”

“I am optimistic about the trip’s outcome,” says Hinkle. “We opened doors and got a great perspective of the trade and development opportunities that exist and how to accommodate the risk of doing business. The SSA market deserves a lot of attention.”



U.S. Ambassador to Senegal Harriet Elam-Thomas welcomes team members to Dakar, Senegal. Team members from left: C.R. Williamson of Williamson Poultry Farms, Braxton, Miss.; Roger Hinkle; and Patrick Steele, Associate Administrator, FAS.



Team members attend a reception in Lagos, Nigeria. photo by Ted MacLaughlin



Bagged rice unloaded by sling at port in Dakar, Senegal. photo by James Caron, AMS



Government officials and agribusiness representatives attend trade team seminar in Lagos, Nigeria. photo by Roger Hinkle

While the U.S. economy is humming, many people still have a hard time putting food on the table and meeting other basic needs. FSA staff, being a part of agriculture, never forget this or our commitment to help ease this suffering. All over the country we are joining forces with concerned citizens, including other USDA staffers, to combat hunger. Our dedication is inspiring involvement from agricultural producers, youth groups, organizations, and other community members. As always, the following is just a sampling of the enormous volunteer efforts taking place throughout our country.

Oregon FSA Committee Members' Generosity Runneth Over

Dan Sundseth, USDA Community Food Security Liaison for Oregon, reports numerous success stories in his state, including one FSA state committee member, Dalton Strauss, who donated 2 steers. With generous help from a local butcher, FSA sent 2,200 pounds of fresh beef to a local food pantry. Tim Winn, Linn County committee member, turned problems harvesting his hazelnut field into a plus for a local gleaning organization. Since he had trouble lining up labor to pick the nuts, he used a helicopter to blow them off the trees. The helicopter, obviously, couldn't get too close to tree branches near some power lines. FSA was happy to help coordinate a harvest for the remaining rows of hazelnuts – 300 pounds in all!

FSA Linn County committee member Betty Marguth and state committee member Jean Nixon offered 5 acres of green beans from their farm. Another FSA state committee member, Sam Asai, donated 1,600 pounds of apples from his orchard.

Two busloads of local high school students learned valuable lessons in community service as they traveled 150 miles to Asai's orchard to package the fruit and load it on the buses. A local restaurant owner opened her kitchen for the kids to process and can the apples. The fresh and canned apples were donated to a local food pantry. As a result of this, the restaurant owner has asked Sundseth to meet with some community leaders to develop a local food security council.

These farmers and many others, notes Sundseth, got the idea to help out after reading about gleaning efforts in state and county FSA newsletters. "We're getting such a huge response that we're having trouble keeping track of all the donations!" says Sundseth. He is meeting with the gleaning coordinator from the Oregon Food Bank to develop a system to thoroughly track food collection results.



High school teens package and load apples for distribution to a food pantry.
photos by Jim Bishop

Iowa's Hat, Mitten, and Sock Tree



Holiday committee members Robin Holcombe (left) and Tammy Maddy harvest clothing donations. photo by Bruce Cordes

And the award for best-dressed tree goes to...the Iowa State Office staff for its festive holiday charity tree. According to Iowa SED Bob Soukup, numerous FSA employees had a hand in decorating the tree with clothing items for donation. The holiday committee harvested an excellent yield of 54 pairs of mittens, 55 pairs of socks, and 27 stocking hats. "The tree looked beautiful," says Bruce Cordes, Iowa Public Affairs Specialist. "It was completely covered." FSA employees delivered the donations to Des Moines' House of Mercy shelter to be distributed to its residents. The clothes helped many children enjoy a happier holiday.

In addition, during the food drive the Iowa State Office collected 171 pounds of nonperishable food which the staff donated to the Des Moines Area Food Pantry. This pantry distributes food to 31 smaller pantries, churches, food kitchens, and shelters. Altogether, these organizations feed over 5,000 people per month. "Both of these volunteer activities were a fun way to get people involved in helping others," says Cordes.

Fresh From the Heart of Utah

After finding out that fresh fruits and vegetables are among the most pressing needs for the hungry, the Utah FSA State Office sprang to action with its "Fresh From the Heart" project. Marlene Berger, Utah's FSA Outreach Coordinator, came up with the unique idea and planned and coordinated the project. She reports that FSA, RD, NRCS, and Utah State University's Extension Service provided boxes to pack donated produce. Berger then contacted the local 4-H Club for assistance. 4-H volunteers distributed the boxes among friends owning gardens and orchards, and also volunteered to help fill the boxes with produce.

The youths collected 1,800 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables and transported them to the Smith Food King grocery store's parking lot for sorting and distribution. The grocery

store staff was so moved by the volunteer effort that they donated another 25,000 pounds of produce! NBA Utah Jazz superstar Karl Malone donated the use of his semi-truck to transport the food to food banks. The produce reached needy families within 36 hours of collection.

"The response to 'Fresh From the Heart' totally exceeded my expectations," says Berger. "We were elated by the success and thank Secretary Glickman for the incentive to serve our communities and feed the hungry." The 4-H kids were so excited by how well things turned out that, with FSA's assistance, they plan to make this a yearly event and expand it statewide. Homeowners were so supportive that many called on the 4-H to return throughout the growing season to pick excess produce.



4-H volunteers load produce onto a food bank truck.

photo by Heather Rasband

Volunteers are using seed packets to advertise participation in the project this year.



Food Collection Contest in Alabama



Robert Jones, NRCS State Conservationist (middle); Barbara Bennett, RD Acting Director (2nd from right); and Daniel Robinson, FSA SED (right) present a certificate of appreciation to Baldwin/Mobile Service Center employees Carolyn King, Angie Billups, and Ann Biggs. photo by Betty Walker

During last winter's food drive, Alabama USDA collected a tremendous amount of food and put in many hours volunteering at local food banks and feeding programs. As an incentive, Alabama State Office management sponsored a contest. Each participating employee of the service center that collected the most food and/or volunteered the most time would receive an 8-hour time-off award. Eighteen Alabama service centers participated, and employees thought up some pretty creative strategies to win.

Congratulations to the Baldwin/Mobile USDA Service Center, with 17 volunteers, 50 hours of volunteer work, 310 pounds of fresh food, and 247 pounds of nonperishable food. How did they do it? Carolyn King of NRCS says, "The 3 agencies in our office really gave it their all." The team collected canned goods, picked pecans at a local farm, donated a 50-pound sack of sweet potatoes, and wrapped and donated some wild venison. "The recipients, including some needy families we visited, really appreciated our donations, so the work was a reward in itself," says King. Even so, each volunteer received a much-deserved day off for their diligence!

Are You On Track?...Strategically, That Is

We've all heard about strategic planning, from the big picture of the whole Federal Government, to our Agency's plan, and to one more level – the state offices. One FSA state office is serving as a prototype for successful strategic planning, and it is paying off for the state as well as for our Agency.

Iowa's five-year proactive plan considers changes in agriculture and policy, and addresses where FSA wants to be in the future and just how to get there. A lot of time and effort went into this plan, starting in May 1998 when Iowa's former SED Tom Grau (now Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services) appointed a 14-member steering committee. The committee consisted of employees from various staff levels and positions, including county and state committee members. The steering committee developed Iowa's strategic plan over a six-month period, and solicited input from all Iowa FSA staffs and even their communities. The finalized plan details goals and provides a well-defined road map for reaching them.

Gary Lamb, State Committee Chairperson, explains, "Along the rural roads of Iowa, rapid changes are taking place that create uncertainties for farm families and their communities. Iowa's strategic plan will shape FSA's ability to provide and deliver badly needed programs and services to not only farmers, but to other residents of rural Iowa. We really have two choices: we can either help shape our own future now or we can let someone else much further removed from the needs and realities of Iowa do that for us. I personally have more faith in the people whose roots grow deep in the Iowa soil and whose values and beliefs are more in tune with the needs for today as well as future generations."

Iowa's management supports strategic plan goals of effective customer service and efficient program delivery. The group determined many other



initiatives, including setting high standards and meeting them, responding quickly to changing demands, and building in flexibility to change. "We especially want to improve and increase the quality and type of information provided to and received from FSA customers," says Bob Soukup, Iowa's current SED.

The committee shares its ideas through a new publication called *Strategic Maneuvers* "Making a Difference." This quarterly newsletter updates staff and provides a forum for Iowa employees to give input on strategic plan issues. For instance, through the newsletter one employee recently asked why there is such interest in and time spent on the plan at a time of heavy workload in county offices. The response was enlightening: "The question of use of resources is a concern as we struggle just to keep up with each day's crisis. However, it is similar to thinking about your retirement. If you only pay day-to-day expenses and not put anything toward your annuity, your retirement may not be enough to provide a comfortable living. It is important to keep the plan in that perspective and think of it as long-term solutions rather than short-term answers."

The committee meets quarterly to support the plan, evaluate progress, and make adjustments to meet the changing needs of FSA and its customers. Committee members have

also formed other teams in the areas of wellness, volunteering, technology, etc. Each team works independently, and the committee publishes their activities in the newsletter.

Eddie Moore, Director of Strategic Planning, Policy and Operations Staff, is proud of Iowa's accomplishments. "Over two years ago, we encouraged all SEDs and state committees to make strategic planning a higher priority. Under the leadership of former SED Tom Grau, Iowa took strategic planning very seriously. Bob Soukup, current SED, is providing extraordinary leadership in implementing this plan. Iowa's state committee, FSA state personnel, and other groups who worked on the plan should be proud of this visionary, results-oriented, inclusive process."

FSA staff members aren't the only ones that have noticed Iowa's work. Marilyn Adams, President and Founder of Farm Safety 4 Just Kids, has worked with Iowa FSA to promote safety. She says, "When I read through my copy of the plan, I was encouraged by the opportunities for FSA to become involved in protecting agriculture's future – children. I appreciate everyone's commitment to continually update this working document. We are proud to be a partner and will work with you to follow your 'road map.' Thank you for including Farm Safety 4 Just Kids on this journey."

The Iowa planners know that the decisions FSA makes today will set a course for the next several years. Because Iowa's comprehensive plan involved input from employees and partners at all levels, the plan will have widespread impact. It will benefit FSA employees, farmers, rural communities, commodity and producer groups, schools, and landowners, as well as our agribusiness partners.

Iowa State employees are justifiably proud of the fact that their plan is being showcased in Washington as a model for other states to follow. So, is your state on track?

FSA Makes Its Debut on PBS

by Chris Bieker, Outreach Coordinator, Washington State Office

Closed access roads? Gail warnings? The show must go on. And it will go on your local PBS station soon. Washington state's FSA, NRCS, and RMA teamed up last October to help the Television Learning Network film an episode of the PBS adventure show "Trailside: Make Your Own Adventure."

"Trailside" features different outdoor documentary-style adventures each week. This year, the show emphasizes how our Nation is protecting its natural resources for future generations. That's where USDA came in. The show's producers approached the Washington USDA agencies with an idea for a show. The three USDA agencies agreed to take part and highlight USDA's work with landowners to protect Washington's water and wildlife. What better way to communicate USDA's work on conservation to thousands – even millions – of people, especially those who we might not ordinarily reach?

Since the show focuses on adventure, we wove our message through hiking and kayaking trips in two Washington sites – the Cascades in Chelan County and Semiahmoo Bay in Whatcom County. District Director Scott Hallett and I were the FSAers among the group. Before we started filming, NRCS Management Analyst Dianne Guidry and I handled the script negotiations.

Harold Crose, NRCS Team Leader, and I guided "Trailside" host Ray Browning through the Cascades during several days of rain and high winds. Two days before filming, we found out that the Forest Service planned to close the access road to the trailhead – just where we needed to go. Thankfully, the local NRCS office stepped in and parked extra rigs on both sides of the road closure to transport people and gear.

While the finished hiking adventure looks as though it happens in several hours, it really took us three days to

complete. We did take after take of scenes on steep stretches of trails. We had to wear the same clothes for each day's filming to make it look as though the hike took place in one day. Throughout our hike, we discussed water quality/quantity issues with Browning, and pointed out the huge diversity of the region's resources.

After filming in the Cascades, we headed west to Semiahmoo Bay. There, Scott Hallett and NRCS District Conservationist John Gillies took over as the kayaking experts on Drayton Harbor and California Creek. The TV crew and USDA staff ran into yet another weather obstacle as rain and winds hampered the outing. But troopers that Scott and John are, they continued on, despite Scott having to ice his wrists in the evening. After a couple of long days paddling in rough waters, Scott decided he no longer wants Ray Browning's job after all!

This was a challenging assignment, but well worth it. We all enjoyed our roles as USDA spokespersons for conservation. We got the chance to stress the value of voluntary conservation on private lands and how sustaining natural resources benefits not only our Earth as a whole, but our local communities.

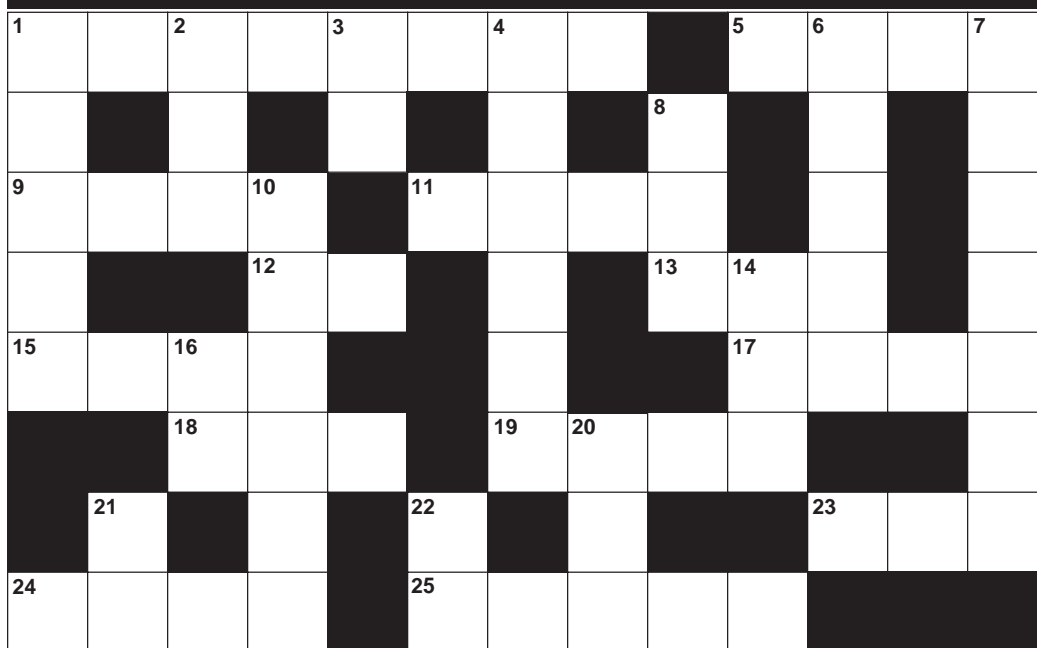
The Television Learning Network is currently editing the episode and will begin airing it in April and throughout this year on PBS. To find out when it will be broadcast near you, check out the "Trailside" website at www.trailside.com



Chris Bieker, Harold Crose, and the TV crew hike near Colcuck Lake in the North Cascades.



From left to right: John Gillies, Ray Browning, and Scott Hallett on Drayton Harbor.

APRIL FSA CROSSWORD**ACROSS**

1. An element found in the air and in all plant and animal tissues
5. An FSA nonrecourse _____ allows a commodity to be forfeited to FSA in satisfaction of the borrower's indebtedness
9. A weather _____ most likely includes a rooster
11. Large sandwich
12. "_____ west, young man"
13. Barnyard sound

15. Wolf's den
17. Turn wheat _____ bread in a mill
18. Fish catcher
19. Shut your farm's dog outside and you might hear this noise
23. USDA agency that provides standardization, grading, and market news services for commodities
24. USDA agency that provides statistical information on agriculture
25. Don't count your chickens before they do this

DOWN

1. Variety of orange
2. 2,000 pounds of produce
3. Farmers tend their crops rain _____ shine
4. Certain commodities, such as corn, can be used as sources of _____
6. This edible bulb is in the same family as chives, garlic, and shallots
7. Keep your livestock away from these weeds to prevent poisoning
8. Nothing compares to food cooked by her
10. CRP helps protect these birds of the heron family that were once almost extinct
14. A squeaky wagon wheel needs this
16. Pig _____ a poke
20. Feed grain loved by horses
21. The FSA state office for this state is in Harrisburg, also the capital
22. The FSA state office for this state is in Columbus, also the capital

EARTH DAY IS APRIL 22

This year marks the 30th anniversary of Earth Day, a celebration to promote environmental causes. The theme for the first Earth Day in 1970 was "New Energy for a New Era." This year's theme is "Clean Energy Now." It's estimated that more than 200 million people celebrate this event in more than 142 countries.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
April 5-6	Lubbock, Texas	Administrator Kelly to attend Plains Cotton Growers, Inc. Meeting
April 10-12	Kansas City, Mo.	Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs, to attend Beginning Farmers Meeting
April 15-17	Tualatin, Ore.	Administrator Kelly to visit the Oregon FSA State Office
April 18-20	Spokane, Wash.	Administrator Kelly to speak at the Washington State Bar Association's Agricultural Law Seminar
April 22		Earth Day
April 24-26	Atlanta, Ga.	Carolyn Cooksie to attend Consent Decree Action Team Meeting
April 28		Arbor Day
April 28-29	Jackson, Miss.	Administrator Kelly to attend County Employees Conference
<i>Note: The above is subject to change.</i>		